

Catholic Racism and Its Opponents*

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INTRODUCTION

On October 14, 1965, the bishops of the Second Vatican Council voted on a resolution about Catholic relations to the Jews. They were called upon to consider the following propositions: that “Jews should not be presented as rejected or accursed by God,” that Christ’s suffering and death “cannot be charged against all the Jews, without distinction, then alive, nor against the Jews of today,” and that “God holds the Jews most dear for the sake of their Fathers.” The result was so overwhelming—1,937 bishops for and 153 against—that subsequent observers have regarded it as preordained and have failed to wonder at the magnitude of the shift. The bishops had put an end to centuries of theologically supported antisemitism, a tradition so massive that right up to the Council Catholic schoolchildren routinely learned that Jews were a “rejected” people, cursed for “all time.”¹

Those who have tried to explain the Church’s change in course—like Michael Phayer or Robert Louis Wilken—focus on the role of the Holocaust in changing Catholic sentiments about Jews.² Yet in fact, the destruction of Europe’s Jews had little direct impact. The Vatican considered its role during World War II impeccable, and it disciplined those few Catholics who explored ways of overcoming theologically grounded contempt for Jews—such as the

* The research for this article has been supported by the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton; the Institute for European Studies at the University of California at Berkeley; the Austrian Marshall Fund; and the project “Borderlands: Ethnicity, Identity, and Violence in the Shatter-Zone of Empires since 1848” at the Watson Institute of Brown University. I am grateful to audiences at the Collegium Budapest, Stanford University, the University of Notre Dame, Calvin College, the Herder Institute in Marburg, and the German Historical Institute in Warsaw. I am also thankful for helpful comments by Suzanne Marchand, John Boyer, Dagmar Herzog, William Hagen, Eric Weitz, Omer Bartov, Gary Cohen, Gerald D. Feldman, Kathleen Frydl, Amir Weiner, Norman Naimark, Yuri Slezkine, Robert Sullivan, John McGreevy, James Turner, Brad Gregory, Mary Vincent, Gyuri Peteri, Brian Porter-Szucs, Bruce Berglund, Patrick Patterson, James Felak, James Ward, Andreas Laun, Martin Kugler, Thomas Gertler, Otto Hentz, Gregory Baum, Reinhold Knoll, and an anonymous reviewer for the *JMH*.

¹ Arthur Gilbert, *The Vatican Council and the Jews* (New York, 1968), 4.

² Michael Phayer, *The Catholic Church and the Holocaust, 1930–1965* (Bloomington, IN, 2000); Robert Louis Wilken, “Something Greater than the Temple,” in *Anti-Judaism and the Gospels*, ed. William R. Farmer (Harrisburg, PA, 1999), 176–202.

The Journal of Modern History 79 (December 2007): 813–847
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group assembled around Gertrud Luckner in Freiburg. Nothing changed until John XXIII became pope in 1958 and unexpectedly mandated a reappraisal of relations to other faiths.

Social scientists resist the idea that single persons can redirect the course of history, but in Catholic-Jewish relations the outstanding role of the new pope is undeniable. Still, he did not work alone. When John XXIII decided to commission the statement that the bishops ultimately voted on, he drew upon the expertise of Catholics who had been exploring pathways out of traditional antisemitism for decades—from a time when the Holocaust was imagined by no one. One was Monsignor John M. Oesterreicher of Seton Hall University in the United States. In the 1930s, he had invited Jews and Christians from across Europe to contribute new thinking on Jewish-Christian relations to his journal *Die Erfüllung* (Fulfillment) published in Vienna.³ He was not alone. By 1935, a small cadre of anti-Nazi Catholics had converged upon the Austrian capital and was fitfully trying to formulate responses to the racist antisemitism flowing in from north of the border.⁴

Michael Phayer has compared such Catholic opponents of antisemitism to “sixteenth-century scientists who suspected that the sun did not revolve around the earth but could not explain heliocentrism.”⁵ How did the collaborators grouped around Oesterreicher succeed in breaking through the virtually impenetrable thicket of theological assumptions that governed Catholic thinking about Jews? My thesis is that the answer lies in the race question: specifically, in the penetration of racism deep into Catholic thought during the 1930s. This racism caused influential Catholics in Central Europe to question the power of baptism to undo the allegedly inherited evils of the Jewish character. They in turn triggered the vigorous opposition of Oesterreicher and his friends, many of whom were of Jewish origin. Through intense confrontation with Catholic

³ In 1953 John Oesterreicher (earlier known as Johannes) founded a center for Judeo-Christian Studies at Seton Hall. He had entered the United States as a refugee in 1940. For his biography see Erika Weinzierl, *Prüfstand: Österreichs Katholiken und der Nationalsozialismus* (Mödling, 1988), 258–64; Annemarie Fenzl, “Msgr. Johannes Oesterreicher,” in *Faszinierende Gestalten der Kirche Österreichs*, ed. Jan Mikrut, 11 vols. (Vienna, 2003), 9:211–26; Clemens Thoma, “Johannes Oesterreicher: Prediger gegen den Nazismus und Wegbereiter der Judenerklärung des Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzils,” in *Unterwegs nach Jerusalem: Die Kirche auf der Suche nach ihren jüdischen Wurzeln*, ed. Andreas Laun (Eichstätt, 2004), 111–24.

⁴ Some of Austria’s leading Catholic thinkers figured in these circles: besides Oesterreicher, they included Alfred Missong, Ernst Karl Winter, Dietrich von Hildebrand, Klaus Dohrn, Cyrill Fischer, Otto Maria Karpfen, Ferdinand Frodl, and Heinrich Mataja. For general orientation, see Martin Kugler, *Die frühe Diagnose des Nationalsozialismus: Christlich motivierter Widerstand in der österreichischen Publizistik* (Frankfurt am Main, 1995).

⁵ Phayer, *Catholic Church*, 186.

racism, Oesterreicher ultimately came to believe that such a thing as purely religious antisemitism could not exist; as a corollary he concluded—remarkably for a European writing in 1939—that race itself did not exist.

In Central Europe, racism and antisemitism had become so inextricably linked that opposition to one necessitated opposition to the other. It was therefore no coincidence that the Vatican II declaration on the Jews featured condemnations of racism and antisemitism in logical succession: Oesterreicher had helped draft it. To understand how the Church finally broke with its legacy of antisemitism, historians need to look beyond the bishops of Vatican II and the great pope who commissioned their work and visit Vienna of the 1930s, where Johannes Oesterreicher and his allies, working under the shadow of Hitler's racist teachings, strained their minds to transcend traditional Church teachings about the Jews.

CATHOLIC RACISM AND THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF CATHOLICISM

In recent years, historians have written revealing studies of Catholic antisemitism. By now the failure of two popes to speak out in defense of Jews facing destruction has become well established.⁶ The failure of the Catholic Church in Central Europe to clearly condemn antisemitism in these years is also well documented.⁷ But, with the exception of Daniel Goldhagen, authors stop short of accusing the Church of racism or of racist antisemitism.⁸ John Cornwell, among the severest critics of Pius XII, writes that the prejudices spread by the Jesuits' Italian-language weekly *Civiltà Cattolica* "were hardly inimical to the racist theories that would culminate in the Nazis' furious assault upon European Jewry," but he does not countenance the entry of these racist theories into Catholic thought and maintains a strict separation between "racist anti-Semitism and religious anti-Semitism."⁹ Susan Zuccotti argues that while Pius XI failed to speak out on anti-Judaism, he did condemn racism.¹⁰

⁶ Susan Zuccotti, *Under His Very Windows: The Vatican and the Holocaust in Italy* (New Haven, CT, 2002); John Cornwell, *Hitler's Pope: The Secret History of Pius XII* (New York, 1999).

⁷ See, e.g., Hermann Greive, *Theologie und Ideologie: Katholizismus und Judentum in Deutschland und Österreich 1918–1935* (Heidelberg, 1969); Beth A. Griech-Polelle, *Bishop von Galen: German Catholicism and National Socialism* (New Haven, CT, 2002).

⁸ Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, *A Moral Reckoning: The Role of the Catholic Church in the Holocaust and Its Unfulfilled Duty of Repair* (New York, 2002).

⁹ Cornwell, *Hitler's Pope*, 28.

¹⁰ Zuccotti, *Under His Very Windows*, 21–23, 30, 33–35. I adopt George M. Fredrickson's understanding of race as "what happens when ethnicity is deemed essential or indelible and made hierarchical" and of racism as involving the "assigning of fixed

Supposedly, the church was the rare institution unafflicted by the modern disease of racism.¹¹ The best evidence for this view is the Church's age-old openness toward converts regardless of ethnicity. This stance was perhaps reinforced in the modern age by political opposition to racism as one among a host of dangerous "materialist" doctrines.¹²

Scholars who have written on racism in the Catholic Church tend to emphasize earlier episodes, especially the blood purity laws that restricted the access of Jewish converts to public office in sixteenth-century Spain and seventeenth-century Rome. Yet these laws were revoked, and some historians note that later racial antisemites did not cite them as precedent.¹³ Other references to Catholic racism are sprinkled throughout a vast literature on Christianity and antisemitism. In his *Infected Christianity* the Canadian author Alan Davies notes the widespread currency of "racist terminology" among French Catholics of the late nineteenth century, drawing particular attention to the activities of such nominal Catholics as Edouard Drumont, who "stressed a qualitative difference between Christian Aryans and non-Christian Semites." The one case of a priest claiming that Jews could not be converted because of their racial traits was the cleric Ernest Jouin.¹⁴

In *The Popes against the Jews* David Kertzer works his way through additional cases: of an archbishop in nineteenth-century Moravia who was asked to resign because of his Jewish extraction, of an eighteenth-century French priest propagating images of "physically other" Jews, of a seventeenth-century "notorious Jewish convert" employed at the Vatican who claimed that baptism could not cure Jews of their foul smell. He also notes that a cofounder of the Jesuits' *Civiltà Cattolica* alleged the existence of a Jewish race in the 1880s. But these cases are scattered through time and space, and one has to wonder

or permanent differences among human descent groups and using this attribution to justify their differential treatment." See Fredrickson's *Racism: A Short History* (Princeton, NJ, 2002), 155–56. I use the word "racialism" to denote the more benign posture of belief in difference not involving advocacy of differential treatment.

¹¹ See, e.g., the report "Text of Vatican Document on the Holocaust," *New York Times*, March 17, 1998, which assumes almost automatic resistance of the Church to doctrines of race.

¹² See the statements of Austrian bishop Gföllner, quoted in Bonaventura Hinwood, *Race: The Reflections of a Theologian* (Rome, 1964), 85.

¹³ See the case of Marc Saperstein cited in James Carroll, *Constantine's Sword: The Church and the Jews: A History* (New York, 2001), 381. Until 1946 the Jesuit order refused entrance of persons of Jewish descent into its ranks. The theologian Rosemary Radford Ruether called this practice the "ancestor of the Nazi Nuremberg laws" (*ibid.*, 382).

¹⁴ This book is Ernest Jouin, *La Judéo-Maçonnerie et l'Église Catholique* (Paris, 1921), 116, cited in Alan Davies, *Infected Christianity: A Study of Modern Racism* (Montreal, 1988), 142.

at their significance. They also tend to fall within an earlier era, when the word “race” had a broader, less biologically tinged meaning. But “given the level of hostility against Jews inculcated by the Church,” Kertzer does perceptively speculate that it “strained credulity to imagine that a people so demonic could be so easily changed, that the person who until yesterday was Jewish could today be one of us.”¹⁵

In the United States, the Catholic Church succumbed to Jim Crow practices, in a sense “acculturating” itself to widespread racism. For example, from 1922 to 1936 not a single black was permitted to enroll at the Catholic University of America. Of 162 Catholic colleges and universities in the United States in the mid-1930s, perhaps a half dozen accepted black students.¹⁶ In the early 1940s, only eight of 368 Catholic nursing schools took blacks.¹⁷ But the Church in America never openly embraced racist thought: it claimed simply that “under current conditions” it was imprudent to mix the races. This kind of accommodationism unsettled Rome. When Pius XI demanded the creation of “native” clergies in 1927 there were fewer than a half dozen black priests in the United States—despite the fact that the German missionary society Society of the Divine Word (SVD) had established an all-black seminary in Mississippi several years earlier.¹⁸ Of ethnic groups the world over, African Americans probably enjoyed the least respect from the Catholic Church—with the possible exception of the Jews. But whereas for Jews the effect was often contempt, for American blacks it was largely indifference.

The literature thus leaves no doubt as to the racist practices of the Catholic Church early in the twentieth century, but it has failed to ask how racist creeds may have entered Catholic thought in the early decades of the twentieth century, when racism was at the height of its influence and scientific respectability.¹⁹ As will be shown below, Catholic thinkers in Central Europe of this period did in fact embrace beliefs grounded in a modern racist worldview: specifically, that Jews were a biological as well as a cultural/religious group and that the sacrament of baptism was powerless to alter their hereditarily determined being. In German-speaking Europe, religious and racial antisemitism had grown together fatefully and inextricably.

If, for a moment, one sheds preconceptions about the power of the holy

¹⁵ David Kertzer, *The Popes against the Jews* (New York, 2001), 211.

¹⁶ George Hunton, as told to Gary McEoin, *All of Which I Saw, Part of Which I Was: The Autobiography of George K. Hunton* (Garden City, NY, 1967), 20, 76, 95.

¹⁷ David W. Southern, *John LaFarge and the Limits of Catholic Interracialism, 1911–1963* (Baton Rouge, LA, 1996), 286.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 81.

¹⁹ In his seminal study of Catholic antisemitism, Hermann Greive noted that at some points Catholic writers applied an implicit racism, but he did not envision the systematic entry of racism into Catholic thought (*Theologie und Ideologie*).

sacraments for Catholics, the popularity of racism among Catholic thinkers in the years between the wars hardly seems surprising. The Holy See, contrary to what is often written, never forbade racist thinking. It never issued explicit instructions on how race was to be understood—that, after all, was a question for sciences other than theology. In 1938 Pope Pius XI issued a set of instructions on the dangers of racism that are often cited.²⁰ What is less often noted is that these instructions forbade “extreme racism” but not recognition of the existence of races or assessments of their relative value. Just as nations were thought of as an undeniable aspect of creation, and thus an undeniable part of God’s plan for salvation, so were races.²¹ As we shall see, there were those willing to deny the existence of “pure races,” but overwhelmingly the popular and scientific discourses within the Central Europe of the time assumed the decisive force of race for shaping human history.²²

In the 1930s to think of Jews as a racial group was common, and even Catholic opponents of Nazi antisemitism spoke of a Jewish race.²³ So did many

²⁰ Two recent studies that argue for the Holy See’s unwavering condemnations of racism are Hubert Wolf, “Pius XI. und die ‘Zeitirrtümer’: Die Initiativen der römischen Inquisition gegen Rassismus und Nationalismus,” *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 53, no. 1 (2005): 1–42; Thomas Brechenmacher, *Der Vatikan und die Juden: Geschichte einer unheiligen Beziehung vom 16. Jahrhundert bis zur Gegenwart* (Munich, 2005).

²¹ The encyclical *Mit brennender Sorge* (March 14, 1937) admits that race is a “basic value of the human community” with an “essential and honorable place within the worldly order.” See Martin Rhonheimer, “Katholischer Antirassismus, kirchliche Selbstverteidigung und das Schicksal der Juden im nationalsozialistischen Deutschland,” in Laun, *Unterwegs*, 30. According to the Instruction on the Errors of Racism of April 1938 (issued by the Sacred Congregation of Seminaries and Universities, of which Pius XI was prefect), it was still permissible to “conserve the vigor of the race and the purity of its blood within the limits of the moral order.” The instruction further did not rule out the possibility of a “limited and accidental gradation of races” or the belief that “racial factors have some influence upon intellectual and moral qualities.” It also did not exclude “from the scope of education the cultivation of a balanced love of one’s race as one among the many good things of creation” (Hinwood, *Race*, 61–69).

²² In the United States and Great Britain a battle was being waged between cultural (Boasian) and biological anthropologists, in which the former gained the upper hand during World War II. See Elazar Barkan, *The Retreat of Scientific Racism: Changing Concepts of Race in Britain and the United States between the World Wars* (Cambridge, 1992). For a fine contemporary survey of the antiracist position, see Ruth Benedict, *Race and Racism* (London, 1942).

²³ The Dominican peace activist Franziskus Stratmann wrote Cardinal Faulhaber in April 1933 to condemn the “blasphemy” of the Nazis’ persecution of the Jews, noting that “Christ belongs to this race in all eternity” (<http://dominikaner.orden.de/geschichte/ns/engelheckert.htm>). His friend Walter Dirks published a piece the following month in which he spoke of the “reality” of the Jewish “race” (“Die Judenfrage als positive Aufgabe,” in his *Gegen die faschistische Koalition, Gesammelte Schriften*, 8 vols. [Zürich, 1990], 2:502). I am grateful to Gregory Baum for this reference.

Jews.²⁴ But some leading Catholic thinkers went further, not only claiming that Jews were different from non-Jews but also arguing that this difference made them threatening and—paradoxically—inferior. What made this Catholic racism confounding was that it claimed to recognize the supremacy of the spiritual while in fact espousing the existence of heritable traits among supposed racial groups like the Jews or the Germans. In a climate of increasing impatience with theological “dualism,” Catholic thinkers fell prey to the idea that the spiritual and biological could be definitively linked. To them, alleged failings of the spirit among particular groups of people—for example, the Jews’ rejection of Christ—came to appear historically indelible. Race became essential and mutable at the same time: a transgression at any moment in the city of God could have fatal and long-lasting consequences in the city of man. Catholic thinkers were especially prone to modern racism in German-speaking Central Europe, where they desperately sought cultural relevance beyond their ghetto.²⁵ For many of them, the scientific discovery of race seemed to reconcile spirit to matter and Catholicism to the German nation. Of special interest was “blood”—a metaphor as resonant for the religious as it was for racists—which seemed figuratively and literally to unite the individual with the collective body (*Volkskörper*). The rise and fall of communities bound in blood now permitted glimpses of God’s will at work in history. Armed with racist notions, theologians could abandon dusty tracts of learned speculation and go out and preach to the faithful with unprecedented certainty about divine intention.

Leading theologians were enthralled with the possibilities offered by a racist *Geschichtstheologie* (theology of history) and soon were bolstering their scientific and national credentials with pronouncements on the divine favor enjoyed by the German *Volk*. Most troubling is Karl Adam, a professor in Tübingen and a thoroughly modern, world-renowned interpreter of Catholicism, whose work is assigned in seminaries to this day.²⁶ As a staunch opponent of

²⁴ On the period before the First World War, see John Efron, *Defenders of the Race: Jewish Doctors and Race Science in Fin-de-siècle Europe* (New Haven, CT, 1994).

²⁵ There was a concern among German Catholics that they not be accused of harming the German race: Munich’s Michael Cardinal von Faulhaber, for example, “defended” Christianity against charges of being weak on the racial front, asking “what should one respond to the monstrous accusation that the Germanic race has been spoiled by Christianity, or that Christianity is not racially fit [*artgemäss*]?” (*Klärung in der Judenfrage: Dokumente zusammengestellt von der Schriftleitung der Berichte zur Kultur- und Zeitgeschichte* [Vienna, 1934], 256).

²⁶ Other leading figures included Michael Schmaus and Joseph Lortz (Lucia Scherzberg, *Kirchenreform mit Hilfe des Nationalsozialismus: Karl Adam als kontextueller Theologe* [Darmstadt, 2001], 115). Yves Congars spoke of “Adam’s understanding of the ‘living tradition,’ the vital dynamism in which the truths of divine revelation are continually being passed on, discovered anew, and realized more fully in the church’s

dualistic philosophy Adam emphasized the inviolability of human sensuality and thus the human side of Jesus Christ; in a 1935 lecture he proclaimed that the “man of the future” was “not the man who has renounced sensuous life, who has been divided and torn asunder by the disastrous opposition of body and spirit, of Bios and Logos, but the man who has been restored to inner unity and wholeness.”²⁷ Like many of the generation of 1914, Adam was an enthusiast of “community”—a concept that, when understood in modern racial terms, helped overcome the dichotomy of matter and spirit and the “disenchantment” of modernity.²⁸ Race and culture—like body and spirit—were inseparable, and Christians were bound to venerate both. Practically that meant that the German *Volk* incorporated the mystical body of Christ and that Adolf Hitler must be recognized as the savior of the “diseased [German] national body,” the man who could restore Germany’s “blood unity” (*Bluteinheit*).²⁹ During World War II, Adam spoke of the need for Catholics to embrace German culture more fully: as his biographer Robert Krieg has written, “according to Adam, since Catholicism respects every particular culture and expresses its universal truths in local forms, German Catholics should enter more fully into their nation’s world view.”³⁰

His sort of racism did of course differ from that of Nazis and other racial antisemites for whom Jews could never, regardless of how many generations, lose their Jewishness. Yet the difference was more a matter of degree than of kind, because in the historical context of the 1930s his views encouraged precisely the kind of ghettoization that proved a necessary stage in the destruction of the Jews. Theologians like Adam blurred the boundaries between Nazism and Catholicism, making them invisible to many believers. They also intensified the common belief that Jews were fated to suffer—a belief that encouraged Christian passivity during the Holocaust.³¹

life.” Cited in Robert Anthony Krieg, *Karl Adam: Catholicism in German Culture* (Notre Dame, IN, 1992), 52.

²⁷ The lecture’s title was “Jesus Christ and the Spirit of Our Time.” Cited in Krieg, *Karl Adam*, 131.

²⁸ Lucia Scherzberg writes that those who longed for *Gemeinschaft* were naturally attracted to the discourse of race: race could “serve as supposedly objective scientific category as well as mythical guarantor of subjective identity” (*Kirchenreform*, 116).

²⁹ Georg Denzler, “Antijudaismus und Antisemitismus in der Theologie unserer Jahrhunderte: Karl Adam, Michael Schmaus, und Anton Stonner,” *Facta Universitatis, Series Law, and Politics* 1, no. 1 (1997): 12.

³⁰ Krieg, *Karl Adam*, 133.

³¹ The influential professor of exegesis in Salzburg, Rev. Josef Dillersberger (1897–1972), *Doktorvater* to bishops and archbishops, wrote in July 1936 that the persecution of Jews in Germany expressed the will of God. He concluded, “Who can argue with God? [Wer darf rechten mit Gott?]” *Katholische Kirchenzeitung* (Salzburg), July 30, 1936, 244ff., cited in Günter Fellner, *Antisemitismus in Salzburg, 1918–1938* (Vienna,

If Adam lent theological authority to scientific racism, there were also Catholic anthropologists and eugenicists willing to contribute cutting-edge scientific authority to Catholic racism. Two stand out in the Central Europe of the 1930s: Viennese professor of anthropology Wilhelm Schmidt (1868–1954) and Berlin professor of eugenics Hermann Muckermann (1877–1962). Both were priests: Schmidt belonged to the missionary order SVD, and Muckermann was a Jesuit.³² They remind us of the influence that valued experts could wield in an organization like the Catholic Church, where scientists of note were few, especially among the clergy. As “scientific experts” they could bring racist thinking into the Church more stealthily and effectively than theologians who lacked the authority to speak on race as well as theology. They were, to use a term coined by Ralph Jessen to describe professors with authority in political and scholarly spheres, “dual citizens.”³³ As “Catholic experts,” each gave hundreds of talks and wrote dozens of articles for popular Catholic audiences over the many decades of their public lives.

Biographers agree on these figures’ outstanding importance. Suzanne Marchand calls Schmidt a “Catholic scientific impresario.”³⁴ Early in the century he set up the premier Central European anthropological journal *Anthropos* and became confessor to the last Habsburg emperor, Charles. In the interwar years he founded a chair for ethnology and was placed at the head of the Institute for Anthropology at Vienna University, where he developed the so-called Vienna School. He and his students controlled appointments in this discipline for decades. In 1923 he so impressed Pope Pius XI that the latter subsidized a museum of ethnology at the Vatican. Muckermann is regarded as decisive in acquainting Catholic opinion with “moderate eugenic thought,” and he possessed considerable influence with Catholic elites active in welfare policy, social work, and education.³⁵ From 1927 to 1933 he acted as director of the

1979), 216–17. See also the judgment of Gustav Gundlach, SJ, that the people of Israel were supposed to “remind us through their very being of the serious responsibility that lies in the gift of the grace of true faith.” In other words, the persecution of Jews was meant to deter Christians from betraying their faith (Anton Rauscher, *Wider den Rassismus: Entwurf einer nicht erschienenen Enzyklika (1938)*; *Texte aus dem Nachlass von Gustav Gundlach SJ* [Paderborn, 2001], 166).

³² Muckermann left the order in 1927 but remained a priest.

³³ Ralph Jessen, *Akademische Elite und kommunistische Diktatur* (Göttingen, 1999).

³⁴ Suzanne Marchand, “Priests among the Pygmies: Wilhelm Schmidt and the Counter-Reformation in Austrian Ethnology,” in *Worldly Provincialism: German Anthropology in the Age of Empire*, ed. H. Glenn Penny and Matti Bunzl, Social History, Popular Culture, and Politics in Germany (Ann Arbor, MI, 2003), 283–316.

³⁵ Among his important contacts were Catholic politicians such as the Prussian welfare minister Heinrich Hirtseifer and the Bavarian minister president Heinrich Held (Michael Schwartz, “Konfessionelle Milieus und Weimarer Eugenik,” *Historische Zeitschrift* 261, no. 2 (October 1995): 420, 422).

department of eugenics at the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Anthropology, Human Genetics, and Eugenics in Berlin.³⁶

Among specialists, Schmidt is best known for his advocacy of monogenesis and his insistence on an original act of revelation (*Uroffenbarung*). His early work focused on Africa, where he established a racial hierarchy among the groups he studied, though he imagined a reciprocal relationship between the environment and the characteristics of human groups. Races arose in reaction to specific environmental conditions, but once they had emerged, he believed, they possessed value, and he opposed racial mixing. Otherwise inferiority might be transmitted, and races might degenerate. He thought the Germans were a master race (*Herrenvolk*) among the racial groups of Europe. Regarding Jews, Schmidt wrote in 1934:

This kind of transgression [i.e., the rejection of Christ] can by itself distort the being of a people; yet in the case of the Jewish people, the betrayal of its high calling has made this distortion go very deep: *corruptio optimi pessima*. In punishment this people, as Christ himself predicted, was driven out of its homeland. Almost two thousand years of distortion and uprooting of its essence has then had a secondary but real effect on its physical race. These racial effects . . . are not neutralized by baptism. For that, Jews will have to work hard on themselves. [Converted Jews] may therefore belong to our number, but not in the same way as our German racial comrades [*deutsche Volksgenossen*].³⁷

Earlier that year, the German-Austrian Antisemitic League thanked Schmidt for his view that baptism was powerless to undo Jewishness.³⁸ According to Schmidt, Jews and Germans had to be kept apart by means of “robust racial hygiene” in order to “isolate and expel harmful foreign bodies” from the German *Volk*.³⁹

³⁶ He was fired by the Nazis for “insufficient *volkisch* attitude [*mangelnde völkische Einstellung*]” (Anahid S. Rickmann, “‘Rassenpflege im völkischen Staat’: Vom Verhältnis der Rassenhygiene zur nationalsozialistischen Politik” [PhD diss., University of Bonn, 2002], 68). His opponents viewed him as “unscientific” and his eugenics as “watered down” by Catholicism (Schwartz, “Konfessionelle Milieus,” 422).

³⁷ Cited in Edouard Conte, “Völkerkunde und Faschismus? Fragen an ein vernachlässigtes Kapitel deutsch-österreichischer Wissenschaftsgeschichte,” in *Kontinuität und Bruch, 1938—1945—1955: Beiträge zur österreichischen Kultur- und Wissenschaftsgeschichte*, ed. Friedrich Stadler (Vienna, 1988), 240.

³⁸ His speech was given on December 10, 1933, at the Katholische Führertagung. See *Wiener Neueste Nachrichten*, December 12, 1933; *Der Stürmer* (Vienna), January 27, 1934.

³⁹ In 1927 Schmidt argued that in modern industrial towns a leading stratum had emerged that was not drawn from the people and was “nothing more than an amalgam of the destructive products of the decadent bourgeois urban intelligentsia, in which Jewish forces are strongly represented.” Cited in Conte, *Völkerkunde*, 239.

Like Schmidt, Muckermann was an enthusiast of the northern race, to which he attributed the “incomparable culture of old Greece.” Anything of value in world history was credited to Nordic influence.⁴⁰ If Italy had a renaissance, that was because of the “blood of the Lombards.” If Spain did not, that was because of the “modest Nordic influx.”

For Muckermann blacks were an inferior race,⁴¹ and Jews were a “racial mixture of Near Eastern and oriental genetic material,” to which he ascribed “an ability to empathize with others at a spiritual [*seelisch*] level.” This capacity explained Jews’ great success in business, literature, acting, music, law, and medicine, especially gynecology. Jews were particularly adept at “steering human passions.” Though he valued Jews’ “sense for marriage and family,” he, like Schmidt, opposed conjugal unions between Jews and Germans because that would erode Germanism.⁴² In order to preserve the “untouched, elemental nature of the German people” he wanted to “push back racially foreign, particularly Jewish, influence in the shaping of our culture.”⁴³

In fairness, it should be noted that both men opposed the sort of eugenics favored by Nazis. Though Muckermann advocated the reproduction of “productive [*leistungsfähige*]” human beings, he opposed so-called negative eugenics, including abortion “for eugenic reasons,” euthanasia, and prohibitions on the marriage of the mentally retarded.⁴⁴ He waffled on forcible sterilization, however, first rejecting it, then accepting it, then subordinating himself to church teaching, and finally attempting a partial rehabilitation.⁴⁵ In 1935 he

⁴⁰ From Hermann Muckermann, *Rassenforschung und Volk der Zukunft* (Berlin, 1928), 18–19, cited in Dagmar Grosch-Obenauer, “Hermann Muckermann und die Eugenik” (PhD diss., University of Mainz, 1986), 25.

⁴¹ “Ewiges Gesetz” (1957), cited in Grosch-Obenauer, “Hermann Muckermann,” 30.

⁴² He also objected to Jewish immigration into Germany (*ibid.*, 32).

⁴³ For a contrasting assessment of Muckermann, claiming among other things that he was a “non-racist eugenicist,” see Donald J. Dietrich, “Catholic Eugenics in Germany, 1920–1945: Hermann Muckermann, S.J. and Joseph Mayer,” *Journal of Church and State* 34 (1992): 581.

⁴⁴ Rickman, “Rassenpflege,” 266 n. 306, 261. Here Muckermann was in keeping with the papal encyclical *Casti Connubi*, according to which abortion was to be rejected even when the mother’s life was in danger. The operational principle here was “natural law,” that is, the woman’s “natural” function of giving birth. Those who died could expect reward in the afterlife (Grosch-Obenauer, “Hermann Muckermann,” 45). Muckermann’s opposition to the abortion of “life unworthy of life” separated him from the vast majority of German eugenicists.

⁴⁵ Initially he rejected such measures as an “intrusive act of violence” (*Gewaltteingriff*), but in 1929 he changed his mind, impressed by the “increasing neediness [*Fürsorgebedürftigkeit*] of the people, and the increased accuracy of genetic prognoses” (Schwartz, “Konfessionelle Milieus,” 423). When he changed his mind in 1931, he did so out of loyalty to the Holy See. On his support for forcible sterilization, see Rickman, “Rassenpflege,” 34, 48. Muckermann made his renewed reservations known at lectures

wrote that the best eugenics was not sterilization but rather “eugenic upbringing and breeding [*Erziehung*] in families that are genetically sound.”⁴⁶

If racism inescapably shaped the minds of Catholic experts, it also helped inform the historical vision of the clergy, down to the local parishes throughout Germany and Austria. Even priests who supposedly figured in the front line of opposition to antisemitism in Austria before the Nazi invasion, like the Austro-Hungarian Jesuit Bela Bangha, spoke of the “congenital moral inferiority of Jews.”⁴⁷ Georg Bichlmair, a Viennese Jesuit who was punished by the Nazis in 1939 for helping protect Jews, spoke earlier of the Jews’ “evil genetic qualities.”⁴⁸ And Alois Mager, a professor who figured among the moderate voices in the Catholic milieu of Salzburg, spoke of the “racial peculiarity” of Jews, whose rejection of Christ helped create a “spiritual attitude of radical denial and subversion.”⁴⁹

For many years defenders of the Church lamented the disappearance of a “hidden encyclical” on racism commissioned by Pius XI, because of its supposedly unmistakable condemnation of racist antisemitism. Recent publication of this document reveals a different picture. A major author, the German expert on race questions, Gustav Gundlach, SJ, fell into the thrall of racism as soon as he turned his mind to the Jewish question. For their part in Christ’s death, “Jewry” (*das Judentum*) “gambled away their exalted historical calling once and for all” and became separated by an “immovable boundary” from the rest of humanity. By turning “against their own blood” Jews had sacrificed their “communal life as a race.”⁵⁰ Through the ages, the church acted correctly to enforce this “peculiar religious-social segregation” (*eigenartige religiöse gesellschaftliche Besonderung*), and the Jews served as a frightening reminder

given in 1932. His “zigzagging” exposed him to the criticism of openly nationalist circles, who took a role in unseating him the following year. His ambivalent position is reflected in quiet approval of the Nazis’ law on the “prevention of genetically damaged offspring” of July 14, 1933 (Grosch-Obenauer, “Hermann Muckermann,” 49–50).

⁴⁶ Cited in Kurt Nowak, “Euthanasie” und Sterilisierung im “Dritten Reich”: *Die Konfrontation der evangelischen und katholischen Kirche mit dem “Gesetz zur Verhütung erbkranken Nachwuchses” und der “Euthanasie”-Aktion* (Halle an der Saale, 1977), 111.

⁴⁷ Sylvia Maderegger, *Die Juden im österreichischen Ständestaat, 1934–1938* (Vienna, 1973), 132.

⁴⁸ His punishment consisted in being forcibly transferred (*gauversetzt*) to Silesian Beuthen, near the Polish border (Erika Weinzierl, “Österreichische Katholiken und die Juden,” in *Ecclesia Semper Reformanda: Beiträge zur österreichischen Kirchengeschichte im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* [Vienna, 1985], 360–61).

⁴⁹ Mager also believed that there was truth to the Protocols of the Elders of Zion (Fellner, *Antisemitismus in Salzburg*, 218–20). For the “ambivalent attitude” of Msgr. Ignaz Seipel toward baptized Jews, see Harriet Freidenreich, *Jewish Politics in Vienna, 1918–1938* (Bloomington, IN, 1991), 8.

⁵⁰ Rauscher, *Wider den Rassismus*, 161–62.

of what would happen to those who “abandoned the gift of the grace of true faith.”⁵¹

OPPONENTS OF NAZISM

Central European Catholics who had thought of Jews as a group in the racialized 1930s imagined them as a race. And those who wanted to escape racist antisemitism confronted the almost impenetrable thicket of scientific and theological assumptions that has just been described. Yet a few Catholics did venture away from the assumptions of their day toward teachings that the Church now takes for granted: that Jews were not a “race” and that they were not cursed by God. If reasoned argument seemed powerless against the racist theology of the 1930s, what drove these Catholics in new directions?

The best explanations are biographical. The Catholics who opposed antisemitism with the greatest conviction were of Jewish origin. They stood horrified as they watched the Nazis erode their cobelievers’ faith in baptism—something that they had considered the bedrock of their new theological home. Since they could not speak out from Germany proper after 1933, voices of dissent tended to emanate from German-speaking regions not under Nazi control, especially from Austria. From 1933–34 to 1938 two Catholics of Jewish origin edited journals opposing racist antisemitism in Vienna: the philosopher Dietrich von Hildebrand and the priest Johannes Oesterreicher. The former, a strong supporter of Dollfuss’s anti-Nazi, antiliberal, and antisocialist experiment, entitled his weekly *Der Christliche Ständestaat*; the latter, director of the Catholic “mission” to the Jews in Vienna (Opus St. Pauli), called his bimonthly *Die Erfüllung*.⁵² Another strongly anti-Nazi Catholic who was not of Jewish origin, the sociologist and left-wing monarchist Ernst Karl Winter, set up the Gsur-Verlag publishing house in which Jews as well as Jewish converts opposed racism and antisemitism.⁵³

⁵¹ Ibid., 166.

⁵² Jews who wrote for *Der Christliche Ständestaat* included Oscar Bam, Stefan Possony, Hans Kandler, Friedrich Wiesner, Viktor Frankl, Egon Wellesz, Willi Reich, Felix Gilbert, Walter Mehring, and Joseph Roth; Catholics who had converted from Judaism included Otto Maria Karpfen, Arthur Ernst Rutra, and Aurel Kolnai (Rudolf Ebner), *Die österreichische Wochenzeitschrift “Der Christliche Ständestaat”* [Mainz, 1976], 186; Dietrich von Hildebrand, *Memoiren und Aufsätze gegen den Nationalsozialismus, 1933–1938*, ed. Ernst Wenisch [Mainz, 1994], 77, 99, 361).

⁵³ Winter’s thesis was that one should “think left while standing on the right.” For critical discussion of his circle of nonconformist Catholics in the “Austrian Action” and the inspiration to work for social reform they took from the antisemite Karl von Vogelsang, see the excellent study by Alfred Diamant, *Austrian Catholics and the First Republic: Democracy, Capitalism, and the Social Order, 1918–1934* (Princeton, NJ,

Despite the hazards posed by Nazi spies in Vienna, these journals and Winter's Gsur-Verlag published articles and books up to March 1938. Their writings betray the tensions of the time: on the one hand a desire to reveal how little was known about race, and on the other a hesitancy to abandon the term; on the one hand a conviction that Jews should not be subjected to hateful generalizations, and on the other a seemingly inescapable assumption that the Jewish people had suffered historically for refusing the divine offer of salvation. To question one component of Catholic antisemitism was to cause an entire ideological edifice to shake.

The most daring and original thinker among the Catholic anti-Nazis, Dietrich von Hildebrand, had grown up in a mostly areligious environment, the Florence and Munich households of the sculptor Adolf von Hildebrand.⁵⁴ He claimed to derive his political views from philosophical principles gained in studies with (the Jewish convert) Max Scheler, the most influential Catholic intellectual in Germany at the time.⁵⁵ Hildebrand continued studies with Edmund Husserl and was awarded the highest distinction (*Prädikat opus eximium*) for a dissertation on moral behavior.⁵⁶

Scheler is given credit for originating the philosophical tendency known as personalism, first popular among "nonconformists" in France and later transmitted to Poland, where it was embraced by Karol Wojtyła.⁵⁷ Above all, personalists rejected "collectivist" thought systems. "A person," wrote the leading French proponent Emmanuel Mounier, "is not one coefficient among others of a social arithmetic." Rather, a person was "a spiritual value . . . at the heart

1960). Winter published the works of Cyrill Fischer, *Die Hakenkreuzler* (Vienna, 1932); Albert Ganzert (Awrum Halbert), *Die Grenze: Ein Schicksal aus 600.000* (Vienna, 1936); Peter Drucker, *Die Judenfrage in Deutschland* (Vienna, 1936); Walter Mehring, Müller: *Chronik einer deutschen Sippe: Roman* (Vienna, 1935); Walter Berger, *Was Ist Rasse? Versuch einer Abgrenzung ihrer Wirksamkeit im seelischen Bereich: Mit Berücksichtigung des jüdischen Rassenproblems* (Vienna, 1936). Mehring's biting satire led to protests by Franz von Papen, the German representative to the Austrian government.

⁵⁴ Hildebrand senior was Protestant but his mother was Jewish—something apparently unknown to Adolf Hitler, who called him the finest German sculptor of the nineteenth century.

⁵⁵ On Scheler's influence in German Catholicism, see Heinrich Lutz, *Demokratie im Zwielficht: Der Weg der deutschen Katholiken aus dem Kaiserreich in die Republik, 1914–1925* (Munich, 1963), 22–42.

⁵⁶ Dietrich von Hildebrand, "Die Träger des Sittlichen innerhalb der Handlung" (PhD diss., University of Göttingen, 1913).

⁵⁷ "Personalism" has proved resistant to definition. The French nonconformist L'Ordre Nouveau reduced its meaning to "the primacy of man over society" (John Hellman, *The Communitarian Third Way: Alexandre Marc's Ordre Nouveau, 1930–2000* [Montreal, 2002], 42). Hildebrand's personalism meant that he reacted allergically against all talk of collectivism.

of all other human reality.”⁵⁸ While personalism may seem hazy when evaluated for implications in the realm of politics, what it meant for an anti-Nazi Catholic philosopher was clear: rejection of “materialism,” emphasis on “spirit,” and therefore relegation of “race” to a subordinate position in the human sciences. Hildebrand wrote that “racial characteristics cannot be shown to have any clear effects on the intellect.” Racism had become possible only because of the modern tendency “to deny the spiritual/intellectual [*geistig*] essence of the person.”⁵⁹ In his view, “grace” was the decisive factor in the formation of human personality.

What was the relation between races and peoples? Which category was more substantial? Hildebrand wrote that national communities (*Volksgemeinschaften*) have “roots other than race.”⁶⁰ In December 1933 his associate Ferdinand Frodl, SJ, agreed: “Nothing can be said about the gifts possessed by varying races, because we know nothing at all about the extent to which biophysical racial characteristics relate to psychic peculiarities.” For Frodl this uncertainty extended to the idea of “people.” For example, what bound together the Jews was unclear, and therefore the “Jewish question” remained open. In his lack of presumption Frodl differed radically from Wilhelm Schmidt. And he suffered for his engagement: in 1944 the Volksgerichtshof condemned him to three years’ imprisonment for attempting to smuggle information to a foreign country.⁶¹

For Frodl, the indistinctness of “race” and “people” suggested the untenability of general statements about the Jews. By contrast, Hildebrand was less willing to forsake generalizations and insisted on the reality of the Jewish people as a spiritual rather than a racial community: from biblical times to the present, Jews had stood for humanity, as the “metaphysical people of all humanity” (*metaphysisches Menschheitsvolk*). To be antisemitic was therefore to be a hater of humanity. Because the Jews represented all humans, Hildebrand drew the conclusion that any other group would have rejected Christ: “Every other people would have mocked, stoned, and crucified Christ. . . . Whatever the Jews did to Christ, whether good or bad, was in fact the answer of humanity.”⁶² His idea of the Jews’ singular spiritual mission thus caused Hildebrand to undo a mainstay of Christian antisemitism. It also led him to reject assimilation.

Ironically, those who turned to Scripture for ammunition against racism

⁵⁸ Emmanuel Mounier, “Manifeste au service du Personnalisme,” *Esprit* 5, no. 49 (October 1, 1936): 82.

⁵⁹ Hildebrand, *Memoiren*, 323, 349.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 350.

⁶¹ “Der Nazi-Bazillus im Taufbecken,” *Der Christliche Ständestaat*, December 17, 1933, 23. Frodl was professor of moral theology in Klagenfurt (*ibid.*, 58, 72).

⁶² Cited in Maderegger, *Die Juden*, 145.

found an abundance of metaphors beloved by the racists—blood, seed, flesh, root, transplanting, or grafting. And of course they also found abundant references to Israel and to the “Jews” as a people. Scripture thus afforded opponents of Nazism a chance to subvert racism in its own terms and to overturn the second major component of Christian antisemitism: the notion that Jews had been cursed for killing Christ.

St. Paul in particular could be read as racist *avant la lettre*. In December 1933 Ferdinand Frodl turned Paul’s protoracist metaphors against Wilhelm Schmidt, who had used a public lecture to speak of the “perversion of the Jews’ inner being . . . as result of the punishment [of killing and denying Christ]”; the “2,000 years have had a psychological effect on [Jews’] being, and . . . cannot be undone by baptism.” Frodl argued that precisely the opposite was true. Comparing an olive tree to the people of God, Paul (Romans 11) likened Israel to the root: Jews were far better suited to Christianity—the “new” people of God—than any other people. Whereas Christians had to be grafted on as “wild branches,” Jews would be “grafted onto their own olive tree.”⁶³

In a 1936 article entitled “Paul and His People,” Johannes Oesterreicher likewise used Paul’s protoracism to turn the tables on Christian racists. Jews were the people “from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came,” the people whom Paul called his “flesh.” Since God does not “repent promises to His people,” one could not say that Israel was “cast off.” To the contrary, Paul insists, “all Israel will be saved.”⁶⁴ Later, in his mature work, Oesterreicher, echoing Erich Voegelin, argued that antisemitic racism grew out of an envy that Jews had been called the “chosen people.” But at that time he was also arguing that races did not exist. One therefore sees him playing both ends of the racial argument at various times: the inveterate opponent of racism was willing to adopt organic genealogy when it served his purposes.

Publisher, sociologist, and politician Ernst Karl Winter, one of the most consistent anti-Nazis operating in Austria in this period, also crafted arguments against the racists in racist terms, though he drew more on his own speculations as a sociologist than on holy texts. On the one hand, he claimed that the “cultural foundations” of the Austrian “space” had been laid by “pre-Nordic . . . Dinarian, Alpine, and Mediterranean” elements, remnants of which were still visible in the Austrian peasantry. The “Nordic invasion” had thrown Austrian culture back by a millennium. On the other hand, he argued that the Austrian and Jewish peoples (*Österreichertum und Judentum*) shared a “special

⁶³ “Nazi-Bazillus im Taufbecken.” On the authorship of this piece, see Ebneith, *Österreichische Wochenzeitschrift*, 185.

⁶⁴ Romans 9:3, 11:14, 26; Johannes Oesterreicher, “Paulus und sein Volk,” *Die Erfüllung*, April 1936, 7–17.

affinity” because of common racial origins. According to him, “Austrian rulers [*Dynasten*] were descended from Jewish kings.” Furthermore, “Austrian culture of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was unthinkable without the positive role of Jews [*Judentum*].” Victor Adler, Emil Steinback, Hugo Hoffmannstal, Arthur Schnitzler, Adolf Sonnenthal, and Joseph Kainz were all indelibly Austrian types (*gehören unverlierbar dem österreichischen Menschentum an*).⁶⁵

Winter’s reference to purported racial types shows the penetration of scientific categories into popular understanding. If the existence of race was taken for granted—at least at the level of original human races of prehistory—so were the words commonly used in racial textbooks to describe racial groups and subgroups. Where Catholic anti-Nazis parted company with Nazi racial science was in their unwillingness to accept clear links between racial and mental or spiritual types. They argued that while race was real, science had not fully exposed the relation between racial type and human character—at least not yet. But because of the underlying assumption of the power of race, a number of writers were tempted to speculate nonetheless: science may as yet have failed to bring group traits into precise focus, but the broad outlines of racial and national character were visible and could be explained only through race or categories like race.

One such writer was Winter’s collaborator Walter Berger, a convert from Judaism to Christianity who penned several articles and a book on the race question in the 1930s. How he became an “expert” on the matter is unclear: his doctorate seems to have been in philology, and after emigration he taught German literature in English public schools. Nevertheless, his 1936 book *What Is Race?* was reviewed positively in Austria, Czechoslovakia, and Switzerland.⁶⁶ His thinking on race is remarkable for its critical recognition of the term’s limitations, on the one hand, but stubborn insistence on maintaining its usage, on the other. He wrote that “special original types” once existed—for example, Nordic or Mediterranean races—but that these could not be grasped through scientific methods. Still, he was certain that one could “intuitively” perceive a relation between physical type and “spirit.” For example, “something of the soul is related to the Nordic body type.” For him the most important collectivity was the *Volk*—a people with shared mentalities and modes of expression. In a given historical moment the unity possessed by a *Volk*

⁶⁵ *Wiener Politische Blätter*, May 24, 1936, 198–99.

⁶⁶ For example in *Basler Nationalzeitung*, *Innsbrucker Nachrichten*, *Neues Wiener Abendblatt*, *Prager Tageblatt*, *Die Nation* (Bern), *Gleichheit* (Prague), *Wiener Zeitung*, *Deutsche Presse* (Prague) (Correspondence Winter-Berger, Dokumentationsarchiv des österreichischen Widerstandes [DÖW], 15060/5). The book was published in Winter’s Gsur publishing house.

overwhelmed the racial components that went into it: in effect, it began forming a new racial group. Thus people of “Dinarian” or “Ostisch” blood might come to share the “same Austrian gesture.”⁶⁷ He used the word *artgleich* to describe this unity, a word that was also popular with biological anthropologists and came to mean something like “of the same species.”

In 1938, Berger fled Austria with his wife and two children and later entered service in the British army. In wartime correspondence with Ernst Karl Winter—an exile in New Jersey—Berger recalled his work on race as opposing Nazi ideology.⁶⁸ But despite—or perhaps because of—its subjective intent, this work serves to remind us of the difficulties of escaping the governing views of his era. Because of Berger’s belief in the heritability of personal characteristics, he failed to break loose from the intellectual substratum of racism. In his writing, *Volk* acquires the characteristics of race, in a sense underscoring the Nazis’ own confused understanding. The Nazi leadership, after all, never attempted an authoritative study of the racial composition of their own people: for all the talk of “Aryans,” the real master people in Germany were the “Germans.”⁶⁹ Berger even conjured the existence of a “people’s type” (*Volkstyp*), which constituted the beginning of a “new kind of race.” This “type” contained the odd mixture of the instinctual and scientific that was typical of the racist discourse of this period: the new *Volkstyp* is expressed “by a special something that one can see, especially when one is abroad.”⁷⁰ In attempting to generate discrete categories based on behavioral characteristics that could be applied to entire sets of people, Berger’s views matched prevalent racist discourse, even as he attempted to make those categories more flexible.

Berger’s underlying racism becomes evident in his writings on Jews. In accordance with the findings of anthropological science, Jews were not a race, Berger asserts, but then he quietly reracializes them by averring that religion had kept Jews apart and united. Over centuries of isolation a “behavior pattern” emerged constituting a “Jewish way”: “extreme intellectualism, an abnormally well-developed sense for commerce, abnormal ambition, relativism.” Jews’ preexisting “genetic makeup” had been “highly cultivated” to produce char-

⁶⁷ Berger, *Was Ist Rasse?* 202–3.

⁶⁸ See his letters to Ernst Karl Winter, DÖW 15060/5.

⁶⁹ The Nazis refused to specify what percentages of “Nordic” blood went into the various German “tribes” (Cornelia Essner, “Im ‘Irrgarten der Rassenlogik’ oder nordische Rassenlehre und national Fragen (1919–1935),” *Historische Mitteilungen* 7, no. 1 (1994): 80–101). The only group defined racially by law—and defined out of the German people—was the Jews, for whom ultimately the Nazis relied upon a religious understanding.

⁷⁰ *Wiener Politische Blätter*, May 24, 1936, 203.

acteristics that “would not disappear overnight”—even after baptism.⁷¹ The Jews’ “in-between state” (*Schwebezustand*) Berger criticized as “unhealthy, forever spawning new catastrophes.”⁷²

Having liberally indulged in generalizations that reveal the imprint of Christian antisemitism on the Jewish convert, Berger then told the reader what separated his approach from that of the Nazis: the “Jewish genetic makeup [*Erbmasse*] has its drawbacks, but not more than is the case with other peoples. . . . In regard to inborn immaturity and sinfulness there is no ‘better’ or ‘worse.’” Walter Berger showed that a mind opened to the basic category of “race” quickly filled with personal and public prejudices, even, paradoxically, while denying that races continue to exist. Racial thinking simply translated epistemic arrogance into new categories, be they people or nation. This was especially the case in Austria and German-speaking Central Europe, where the biological meaning of race, supported by the Third Reich, could not be ignored and tended to impose itself upon the more generic understanding of race as synonymous with “nation.”⁷³ In Johannes Oesterreicher, pride in ancestry tended to overwhelm such triumphalism, and perhaps in his case it was intensified by the guilt of the convert.

Those rare theologians who refused to enter the terrain of racial science wound up at positions more congenial to our present temperament. In such cases, premodern sentiments translate more easily—if not directly—into current sensibilities. An example is the French Franciscan B. Lacombe, who wrote on the Jewish question in Hildebrand’s *Christliche Ständestaat* in 1936. In his view the “Jewish question . . . as a modern daily problem of politics, culture, and sociology . . . is exclusively a this-worldly concern. . . . Therefore Catholic theology in the strict sense and the Jewish question of today have nothing to do with each other.” Lacombe did not absolve himself of all concern for the matter: in fact, he viewed the question as supremely ethical. The “Jewish question” belonged in the realm of moral theology, where one could discover “binding Church decisions about antisemitism.” Lacombe’s conclusion was impatiently terse: “Antisemitism belongs in the confessional booth—that is its relation to theology.”

Lacombe did not belabor scripture, nor did he speculate on manifestations of God’s will in history: “To approach the Jewish question as ‘punishment of

⁷¹ Ibid., 210.

⁷² Ibid., 209. In his book, Berger dwells upon positive Jewish characteristics: “disdainfulness of murder and blood, spiritual gentleness, a sense of justice.” But he also warns against generalizations (*Was Ist Rasse*, 37).

⁷³ On the entry into German discourse of biologized and racialized nationalism, see Christian Geulen, *Wahlverwandte: Rassendiskurs und Nationalismus im späten 19. Jahrhundert* (Hamburg, 2004).

God' is not some mystical way to gain a profound understanding of the 'problem' but rather a shallow mystification of sins we ourselves have committed."⁷⁴ The very notion that there was a Jewish "problem" was itself an outgrowth of sinfulness that spoke to the "inadequacy of human nature."⁷⁵ And the "blood and power, hatred and domination" to which antisemites appealed were the "fruits from which one could recognize the weeds" out of which they drew inspiration. Race, whether or not it existed, should not divide people: "Politicians who imagine blood as some special nectar are the children of Mephistopheles. Christians love God too much to be afraid of any race, and the 'yellow peril' or the 'Jewish question' are problems of a humanity that is estranged from God. . . . When they cease being brothers in God, humans become a danger for each other. Whites and Aryans are a terrible danger for other peoples, and in Japan and China the 'Jewish question' translates into 'hatred of foreigners' and 'Boxer rebellion.'"

Lacombe used words like "Aryan" and "race" uncritically because his charge as a theologian was not to deny or affirm the realities lying behind such words but to make clear that whether or not they existed, the Church belonged on a different plane. Nothing could distract the believer from the sinfulness of hatred and fear.

Lacombe's refusal to engage "history" and "politics" did of course leave the door open to absolving the Church of fomenting antisemitism.⁷⁶ This is a door that Dietrich von Hildebrand, a man similarly hostile to modern times, and whose journal had translated Lacombe's essay, was eager to enter, as were his collaborators (including Jacques Maritain) in a composite essay published in New York in 1937. For them, antisemitism was exclusively an outcome of the modern age and had no relation to Christian teaching. The authors leapt at the chance to use a critique of antisemitism to emphasize their displeasure with the age in which they lived:

Secularism, however, can also bring about (indeed it has already done so) the most vehement attacks against the Jew. This must be the case whenever mankind is not considered as a unit conditioned by reason, but when reason, humanity and honor are tied up with a certain "blood," when race is something that belongs to humanity as a whole and a certain race to a particularly high type of humans. In such views the Jews appear as representatives of an "anti-race," i.e., they are the bearers of a blood composition which makes them the foes of true humanity, the destroyers of healthy and noble racial and national components with their dependent creations; taken in the widest

⁷⁴ Lacombe, "Katholische Theologie und Judenfrage," *Der Christliche Ständestaat*, May 10, 1936, 441–42.

⁷⁵ "sie [Die Judenfrage] implicite als bestehend anerkennen, was eben ihre Sünde ist" (ibid.).

⁷⁶ At most he says that Christians as well as Jews have made the "Jewish question" a "problem" (ibid.).

sense, from politics to lyrics. Consequently, it is said, that they have to be placed under special laws which, according to these anti-Semites, will prevent the Jews from exercising their disintegrating and dissolving influence.⁷⁷

In defense of these authors one might note that one possible step toward overcoming tradition is to deny that tradition exists. And, though potentially an apology for Christian antisemitism, this approach does provide a basis for opposing Christian racism. At this point, scrutiny of Scripture for the seeds of antisemitism was a rather new art.⁷⁸ In Central Europe those who sought to overcome Christian antisemitism denied that Christianity could be antisemitic.

Among the more remarkable approaches of this sort was a short piece by the German theologian Annie G. Kraus—a convert to Catholicism who later worked with Karl Rahner—entitled “Religious Antisemitism,” which appeared in *Der Christliche Ständestaat* in 1934. In a novel interpretation, she argued that Catholicism, unlike Protestantism, had always been “absolutely resistant” to antisemitism, because Catholicism could not sanction the separation of the Old from the New Testament. Furthermore, Catholicism, with its focus on good works, was less likely to tolerate antisemitic acts. Amazingly for the time, Kraus admitted the errors of the Church in the frequent overzealousness to convert: this practice supposedly violated the teaching of St. Thomas Aquinas that one may not prematurely anticipate the will of the Almighty. Indeed, forcible conversion was evidence of the converter’s own lack of faith. She concluded with the extraordinary statement that the “Jews are the last hope of the world.”⁷⁹

Like Oesterreicher, Kraus viewed as mythical the idea of purely religious—or purely areligious—antisemitism. Perhaps she inspired him: the full text of Kraus’s pioneering statement was one of the few things Oesterreicher managed to salvage before a last-minute flight from Paris in June 1940.⁸⁰ He had been making radio broadcasts from the French capital to Wehrmacht soldiers urging

⁷⁷ *The Church and the Jews: A Memorial Issued by European Scholars* (Washington, DC, 1937), 23. The brochure initially appeared in *Die Erfüllung*, February 1937, 73–101; its signatories included T Rev. Dr. Silvester Braito, OP, and Rev. Basilius Lang, OSB (Czechoslovakia), Prof. Edgar de Bruyne (Belgium); Rev. Charles Devaux, Stanislas Fumet (France); Rev. Cyrill Fischer, OFM, Rev. Alois Wildenauer (Austria); Rev. Charles Journet, Rev. Benoît Lavaud, OP (Switzerland); Dr. Eduard Pant (Poland); Rev. Franziskus Stratmann (Germany; Italy).

⁷⁸ See the pioneering studies of James Parkes, *The Conflict of the Church and the Synagogue: A Study in the Origins of Anti-Semitism* (London, 1934); Conrad Henry Moehlman, *The Christian-Jewish Tragedy: A Study in Religious Prejudice* (Rochester, NY, 1933).

⁷⁹ A. G. Kraus, “Der religiöse Antisemitismus,” *Der Christliche Ständestaat*, April 8, 1934.

⁸⁰ It is now contained in Oesterreicher’s papers at the library of Seton Hall University.

opposition to Hitler.⁸¹ Now the Gestapo sought Oesterreicher in vain, but they located and destroyed stores of his own mature statement, the book *Racisme—antisémitisme, antichristianisme*.⁸²

In two years of Parisian exile Oesterreicher had taken time to read and think systematically, and he concluded that racism and antisemitism were inseparable, one implying the other. In his book he pulled together the most radical strains from the French milieu and combined them with all that he had learned from his base in Vienna in the previous decade. There he had culled perspectives from his birthplace in the Czech lands, but he had also cultivated contacts extending to Rome (with the Dominican peace activist Franziskus Stratmann), Zurich (to Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi, Karl Thieme, and Waldemar Gurian), Katowice (to Eduard Pant), and finally Paris (to Jacques Maritain). His book also integrated extensive—and, for the time, enlightened—statements of American bishops on race and antisemitism. As such it united the most progressive—if not modern—thinking in Catholicism of his day on the race question and brought it to a synthesis.

After taking apart the contradictions of Nazi racism—for example, Hitler's confusing of species and race in *Mein Kampf* ("Can one enter into a discussion with such nonsense?")—he considers the "Negro," for racists obvious evidence of the substantial differences between races. How was one to explain that the "intellectual *niveau*" of blacks has remained lower than that of whites? Drawing upon the American literature, Oesterreicher concluded, "This has nothing to do with a consubstantial inferiority. Rather, in many cases the differing *niveaus* are a result of climatic conditions; in others, they result from the treatment that Negroes have endured from a social point of view. . . . It would be false to act as if the civilization of white peoples is in every regard superior to that which Negroes would create if they lived in similar geographic circumstances."

Years of study had taught Oesterreicher how few definitive answers anthropology could deliver. Civilizations differed: in some ways, some were superior; in other ways, they were inferior. "That is all that one can say. In reality, no race exists."⁸³ For this period, that was an extraordinary statement—whether from churchman, scientist, or layman.⁸⁴

⁸¹ These broadcasts have been published as John M. Oesterreicher, *Wider die Tyrannei des Rassenwahns: Rundfunkansprachen aus dem ersten Jahr von Hitlers Krieg* (Vienna, 1986).

⁸² It was reissued in the United States: John M. Oesterreicher, *Racisme—antisémitisme, antichristianisme* (Paris, 1940; repr. New York, 1943). For the German original, see *Rassenhass Ist Christushass* (Klagenfurt, 1993).

⁸³ Oesterreicher, *Racisme*, 41.

⁸⁴ On the struggle against scientific racism in the United States and Great Britain, see Barkan, *The Retreat of Scientific Racism*.

Like Hildebrand, Oesterreicher emphasized the value of the individual person, which was obliterated in racist thinking: "The fundamental error of racism consists in the fact that it considers humans only as elements of a race . . . [yet] a human is never an undifferentiated member of a group. [Actually] a human is always and above all an individual, he is a person."⁸⁵ Why did people succumb to this error? His basic answer was the sin of blasphemy: "The 'Aryan' man feels himself called to be the creator and master of the world, which he imagines exists for his own glory. . . . The racist folly is a rebellion against God, who on Sinai gave . . . his commandments to the people of Israel and to all of humanity: 'I am the Lord your God. You will have no gods before Me.' [Thus] the myth of superiority of the 'Aryan' race . . . in the end is a protest against the election of Israel."⁸⁶ In Oesterreicher's view, this rebellion necessarily led to hatred of Christ, both as Son of God and as Jew; the "world" was "scandalized" by the fact that "God became man and our brother as a member of the Jewish people, of God's people." Thus, all persecution of Jews "touches" Christ.⁸⁷

Oesterreicher demonstrated in case after case how antisemites in the end turned their fury against the Catholic Church. Alfred Rosenberg said in 1938 that the Church was the most dangerous enemy of National Socialism.⁸⁸ He wrote that the redeemer's offering of his life for humanity was a "Semitic" doctrine. Faith in redemption was "Asiatic" or "Syrio-Judeo-alpine." Oesterreicher cited a case from Linz in 1933 in which Christ as a Jew was hanged on a swastika, as well as an incident from Cologne in 1934 in which "Die Like a Dog Christ!" (*Christus verrecke*) was written on churches. There was another story from Germany in which a Catholic boy refused to genuflect before a crucifix, demanding: "First get rid of the Jew!"⁸⁹

Oesterreicher neglected to say which kind of hatred was primary: did antisemites hate Jews because they hated God and wished to defy him in light of the favor willed upon the Jews; or did they hate God—Christ—because he was Jewish? For him, the two kinds of hatred were inseparable: "Hatred of Christ is the hidden source and the ultimate effect of hatred of Jews."⁹⁰ For Christians it was therefore illusory to believe that antisemitism did not concern them. In fact, racist antisemitism was a basic test of politics and character: "Tell me what you think of the myth of blood and of race, tell me your attitude toward Jews, and I will tell you who you are."⁹¹ One ignored this fact at one's

⁸⁵ Oesterreicher, *Racisme*, 43.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 125.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 131–33.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 147.

⁸⁹ The more common Nazi invective was "Juda verrecke!" (ibid., 136–37, 139).

⁹⁰ Ibid., 135.

⁹¹ Ibid., 23.

own peril; in private correspondence, Oesterreicher agonized at the silence of the pope and his attempts to “curry favor” with Hitler.⁹²

NONSIMULTANEITY

A study of Catholic racism involves excursions to various planes of analysis, but they do not relate to each other according to any clear logic. Rather, they bring to mind Ernst Bloch’s notion of “nonsimultaneous historical development [*Ungleichzeitigkeit*]”: the political does not match the scientific, which in turn does not match the theological. On the eve of World War II, the most modern theologians and scientists became inveterate racists, while Nazism’s most courageous opponents were often monarchists and neoscholastics. They unfolded campaigns for peace and against racism not from secure democracies but from a place that had slid into authoritarianism and eschewed parliamentary rule. It called itself a “Christian corporatist state” but is known to us as “Austrofascist.” A former Jew worked tirelessly from the capital of this Austria to convert Jews to Catholicism—a deeply antisemitic enterprise—and thereby helped lead his Church away from poisonous theological images of the Jew it had espoused for centuries.

What can we make of these paradoxes? How could theologically minded Catholics escape the tangle of heinous assumptions about Jews that were widespread in the 1930s? The first thing to note is that no relation existed between theological “modernity” and a propensity to oppose racist antisemitism. More modern thinkers were not more tolerant. After the isolation of the *Kulturkampf* an intense desire for social and political relevance had gripped German Catholics. And after the lacerating traumas of World War I, many German Catholics also wanted a Church that spoke directly to the concerns of the modern world. In liturgical as well as youth movements, they tried to “experience the reality of the church in a new way, [as] a lived reality in which they took part.” The slogans of the time—“We are the Church,” and the “Church is coming alive in our souls”—reflect an insistence on palpable religiosity and a rejection of the dusty formalism and rigorous theological truth statements that had alienated many Catholics of the prewar Church.⁹³ Enthusiasts of the new “liturgical movement,” with their skepticism of reason, were prepared to embrace the irrational, the vital, and the organic. Some, including Ildefons Herwegen, Karl

⁹² See Oesterreicher’s letter to Karl Thieme, May 4, 1939, in Institut für Zeitgeschichte (Munich), ED 163/60. In his book he also wrote that “One is disturbed by the silence of so many Germans and Austrians who should speak out”; Oesterreicher, *Racisme*, 98.

⁹³ Klaus Schatz, *Zwischen Säkularisation und Zweitem Vatikanum: Der Weg des deutschen Katholizismus im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt am Main, 1986), 214.

Adam, and Robert Grosche, built ideological bridges to the Nazis.⁹⁴ But Germany also had leftist Catholic circles who hoped for a more democratic church and stood in opposition to the Nazis. One charismatic thinker in this group advocated tolerance toward Jews in a piece published in early 1933.⁹⁵

After this date, his and other voices were silenced in Germany, and open discussion among German Catholics moved southward to Dollfuss's corporatist Austria. Some found their way to new ideas about Jews from a neoscholastic insistence upon the separateness of the supernatural and natural and a refusal to entertain the speculations of *Geschichtstheologie* about God's place in nature. They resisted what Herbert Vorgrimler has described as characteristic of modern theology, namely, a "stronger turn toward earthly reality."⁹⁶ This was most obviously true of Father Lacombe, but it was also true of Dietrich von Hildebrand, for whom ethical norms overrode all temptations to fit himself into the spirit of a time. For him spirit was personal, and what he called "respect for the person" was an absolute value. This contrasted to the demands of the liturgical movement that modern men surrender their individuality.⁹⁷ Yet as we have seen, some Viennese anti-Nazis went beyond *Geschichtstheologie* to a positive assessment of Jews as a race that continued to enjoy divine favor, while at the same time calling themselves antiracists. The best case is Johannes Oesterreicher. Here we seem to have a theological opportunism carried by an urgent desire to counter the Nazi ideology entering the Church. The eclecticism extended to science: despite persistent suspicions of modernity, Oesterreicher and his friends invoked the authority of science when it might stand against "pseudoscience" or when science could show the limits of science.⁹⁸

⁹⁴ On Adam's appeal to those interested in Jesus Christ as a "living person," see Krieg, *Karl Adam*, 81–82. Concerning Grosche, see Schatz, *Zwischen Säkularisation*, 218, 253. One of the best-known bridge builders, Bishop Alois Hudal, head of the German college at the Vatican (Anima), was rather traditional in his antisemitism and argued that the "Jewish problem" did not concern "the physical factor of blood, but rather the spiritual factor of a historical act of will." Precisely by taking modern racism at its word—that is, at its contradictions—he managed to retain room in his analysis for the traditional Catholic views that denied the importance of race for the sacraments: "The Church [will not] recognize the racial side of the baptism of Jews or of mixed marriages." But then, typical of a German nationalist gratified by Hitler's saber rattling, Hudal wrote that this did not mean that the "Church will protest restrictions on Jewish influence in the life of the state. Experience shows that the assimilation of the Jews to foreign races [*fremdes Volkstum*] often remains purely superficial." Here Hudal was also acknowledging the deeper powers of race (*Die Grundlagen des Nationalsozialismus* [Vienna, 1937], 93, 88).

⁹⁵ Dirks, *Die Judenfrage*.

⁹⁶ Cited in Karl Rahner, *Faith in a Wintry Season*, ed. Paul Imhof and Hubert Bialowons, trans. Harvey D. Egan (New York, 1990), 50.

⁹⁷ Schatz, *Zwischen Säkularisation*, 216.

⁹⁸ Oesterreicher, *Racisme*, 121. The anti-Nazi Cyrill Fischer, OFM wrote in 1932

But it is ungenerous to accuse a man like Oesterreicher of opportunism when his time presented so little clarity, when such a thing as a “liberal” theologian hardly existed in Central Europe, and when the most “modern” thinkers espoused not parliamentary democracy but authoritarianism and racism.⁹⁹ But if one cannot correlate theological preference and political choice, what in general can one say about those Austrian Catholics who opposed Nazi racism?

Hildebrand’s followers portray his stance as a “strict consequence of his philosophy”—just as Heidegger’s sympathy for National Socialism supposedly flowed logically from his philosophy. They trace Hildebrand’s anti-Nazism to his “personalism” and consistent rejection of “any form of relativism and positivism.”¹⁰⁰ One wonders, however, whether Hildebrand’s opposition to Nazism and racism derived so completely from philosophical principles: in other contexts, personalism hardly protected its proponents from antisemitic ideas.¹⁰¹ Perhaps it makes more sense to look at Hildebrand’s biography: he grew up in the cosmopolitan and tolerant atmosphere of an artist’s household, but, more important—and like many Catholics who became most prominent and influential in Christian-Jewish affairs—Dietrich von Hildebrand was of Jewish descent.

The role of Jewish converts in propelling the Catholic Church toward greater religious tolerance is an understudied but potentially fruitful topic. At the First Vatican Council in 1870 the brothers Lémann—Jews who had become Catholics and priests—presented a draft declaration on relations between the Church and Jews stating that Jews “are always very dear to God because of their fathers and because Christ has issued from them according to the flesh.” This was an initiative “without precedent.”¹⁰² A half century later, the Dutch nun, convert, and former anarchist Maria Francesca Van Leer founded an initiative with two Dutch priests favoring greater understanding called “Amici

that no “science” could disprove the unity of humankind (*Die Nazisozzi* [Vienna, 1932], 56).

⁹⁹ G. Casalis, a French scholar who has tried to detect a relationship between adherence to the ideas of Karl Barth and antifascism in the 1930s remarks that “coherence between theology and politics is—in that epoch—the affair of a minority” (*Eglises et chrétiens dans la II guerre mondiale: La France*, ed. Xavier de Montclos et al., 2 vols. [Lyon, 1982], 2:69).

¹⁰⁰ Josef Seifert, “Personalistische Philosophie und Widerstand,” in *Dietrich von Hildebrands Kampf gegen den Nationalsozialismus*, ed. Josef Seifert (Heidelberg, 1998), 108.

¹⁰¹ On France see John Hellman, *The Communitarian Third Way: Alexandre Marc and Ordre Nouveau, 1930–2000* (Montreal, 2002).

¹⁰² As a petition it was signed by 508 of 1,087 bishops in attendance; the petition was withdrawn to prevent it from gaining greater support than the draft on papal infallibility, which had reached 510 signatures (René Laurentin, *L’église et les juifs à Vatican II* [Paris, 1967], 43–44).

Israel.”¹⁰³ It demanded an end to calling Jews “deicidal,” to targeting Jews for “conversion” (they preferred speaking of “return”), and to speaking without respect for Jewish ritual. Instead, the group urged Catholics to underscore God’s special love for the people of Israel and the permanence of this love. In the words of French scholar Menahem Robert Macina, Amici Israel’s ideas amounted to a “rupture with the spirit of the times.”¹⁰⁴ In July 1928 the Vatican closed the initiative largely for fear of its “political” pretensions but also as an expression of the deep antisemitism of some of Pope Pius XI’s advisers, as well as his own disdain for religious tolerance.¹⁰⁵ At the time of suppression the association counted as members several thousand priests around the globe, including nineteen cardinals.

In 1843 the French convert Théodore Ratisbonne had set up a congregation devoted to promoting further conversions: the order of Notre Dame de Sion. By the 1950s, several of its younger members were beginning to concentrate on furthering understanding and friendship between Christians and Jews. Especially remarkable were the activities of the converts Geza Vermes, Paul Démann, and Renée Bloch, who led a campaign from their Paris offices against Catholic textbooks teaching hatred of Jews.¹⁰⁶

When in 1960 a Secretariat for Christian Unity was created during preparations for Vatican II, two of three priests taken on as advisers in Jewish-Christian affairs were of Jewish origin. One of them was John M. Oesterreicher, the other Gregory Baum, originally of Berlin. The cardinal in charge of this section, August Bea, and the other priest, Leo Rudloff,¹⁰⁷ were also from German-speaking central Europe—not coincidentally, because it was

¹⁰³ The priests were the Crutched Friar Anton Van Asseldonk and the Franciscan Laetus Himmelreich.

¹⁰⁴ This from their brochure *Pax super Israel*. See M. R. Macina, “Amis d’Israël: Un ‘nouveau regard’ en avance sur son temps” at <http://www.chretiens-et-juifs.org/article.php?voir%5B%5D=134&voir%5B%5D=2378> (February 15, 2003). Macina takes the citation from Georges Passelcq, Bernard Suchecky, *L’encyclique cachée de Pie XI: Une occasion manquée de l’église face à l’antisémitisme* (Paris, 1994), 140–44. See also M. R. Macina, “Amis d’Israël: Une initiative prématurée mais instructive,” *Sens* (*Bulletin de l’Amitié Judéo-Chrétienne de France*) 228 (May 1998): 242–46.

¹⁰⁵ See Hubert Wolf, “‘Pro perfidis Judaeis’: Die ‘Amici Israel,’ und ihr Antrag auf eine Reform der Kartagsfürbitte für die Juden,” *Historische Zeitschrift* 279, no. 3 (December 2004): 611–58; Brechenmacher, *Der Vatikan*, 155–60.

¹⁰⁶ Among their publications was Geza Vermes, Paul Démann, and Renée Bloch, *La Catéchèse chrétienne et le peuple de la Bible* (Paris, 1952). See the discussion in Geza Vermes, *Providential Accidents: An Autobiography* (Lanham, MD, 1999), 100–103. See also the interview of Vermes on Austrian Radio National, August 28, 1999, at <http://www.abc.net.au/rn/relig/spirit/stories/s47729.htm> (April 18, 2005). Bloch died tragically in 1955, and Vermes and Démann both subsequently left the Church.

¹⁰⁷ John Hammond, *A Benedictine Legacy of Peace: The Life of Abbot Leo A. Rudloff* (Weston, VT, 2005).

from their homeland that the challenge of Catholic racism had emerged, and it was there that the urgency of a response was best understood. By 1965 they produced a document that removed from Church teaching anti-Jewish elements that had poisoned Catholic minds for centuries.

The role of former Jews is paradoxical. On the one hand, their efforts were often devoted to conversion, an enterprise hostile to Judaism.¹⁰⁸ Yet in the increasingly secular societies of early twentieth-century Central Europe, these efforts evolved in character. Force or threat of exclusion ceased to be options, and Catholics had to make a “positive” case to would-be converts. A prerequisite was respect for the present identity of those to be converted. Thus Oesterreicher devoted energies in the 1930s to clearing away falsehoods about the Talmud or Jewish ritual.

A second factor that becomes apparent in the case of Oesterreicher is personal passion: the passion of the convert, brought to white heat by hypocrisies among his new brothers in faith. If Oesterreicher was a man with a mission, his mission was more to the Christians than to the Jews. In letters from the period he noted with bitterness that some Viennese thought him unworthy and would not receive the Eucharist from a “Jew.” Though outwardly disciplined and loyal to the Church throughout his long life, he also made clear his impatience with the silence of its leaders on the plight of the Jews.

VIENNA AND CATHOLIC TOLERANCE

Like the Führer of the Third Reich, Oesterreicher had come to know racist antisemitism on the streets of Vienna. But more than personal biography was involved in his extraordinary engagement in Christian-Jewish relations that spanned sixty years. His perception was also a perception shared by a number of Vienna-based Catholics who viewed with alarm the Nazi barbarism across the border and the infiltration of pro-Nazi sympathies into their own milieus.

The existing literature makes Vienna—the city of Lueger and other formative antisemites—seem an unlikely place for Catholics to organize against racism. In a recent work, sociologist Michael Mann studies Dollfuss’s Austria as one of five cases of a successful fascist movement in power. Mark Mazower has described this Austria as a place of “violent anti-Semitism” that was “pursuing the goal of a *Judenrein* community.”¹⁰⁹ Readers of these works will be surprised to learn that almost a million copies of a weekly combating antisemitism were printed in Vienna in 1934 under the direction of the remarkable Irene Harand, a Catholic who founded a “World League against Racial Hatred

¹⁰⁸ The role of former Jews at Vatican II was, however, noticed by the media. See, e.g., “How the Jews Changed Catholic Thinking,” *Look*, January 25, 1966.

¹⁰⁹ Mark Mazower, *Dark Continent: Europe’s Twentieth Century* (New York, 1999), 31.

and Human Need” in the Austrian capital.¹¹⁰ Vienna was also a place with a diverse and vibrant Jewish press, where the anti-Nazi circles around Hildebrand and Oesterreicher could function freely and with official support, and where Ernst Karl Winter became a vice mayor. “Austrofascism” not only tolerated but even encouraged the anti-Nazi response to emerge. Hildebrand and Harand made clear that the Christian corporatist state provided ideal working conditions; for them, Engelbert Dollfuss was not a fascist but a martyr for human rights—human rights that Weimar democracy had failed to protect.¹¹¹ These facts are obscured by Mazower’s gloss on “Austrofascism” as “no less hostile to democracy and parliaments than was Nazism.” In the view of many on the left and the non-Nazi right, “democracy and parliaments” had paved the way to Nazism.

In some measure Mazower is certainly right. Dollfuss and his successors tolerated and often abetted a “quiet, creeping anti-Semitism.”¹¹² They were also avowedly and violently aliberal, and of course anti-Marxist.¹¹³ But the word “Austrofascism”—originally an epithet cast from the left—misleads, because the Austrian corporatist state was not fascist. It was not revolutionary, nor totalitarian—even in ambition—nor did it favor “national cleansing.”¹¹⁴

¹¹⁰ The exact number of copies of Irene Harand’s weekly *Gerechtigkeit* printed in 1934 was 946,700. The following year Harand published her rebuttal of Hitler’s *Mein Kampf* titled *Sein Kampf: Antwort an Hitler* (Vienna, 1935). See the excellent biography of Harand by Christian Klösch, Kurt Scharr, and Erika Weinzierl, *Gegen Rassenhass und Menschennot: Irene Harand—Leben und Werk einer ungewöhnlichen Widerstandskämpferin* (Innsbruck, 2004), 126 and passim.

¹¹¹ For the critique of parliamentary democracy of Hildebrand’s circles, see Ebner, *Österreichische Wochenzeitschrift*, 144. Internal correspondence shows that the Fatherland Front looked upon the activities of Irene Harand with suspicion (see Klösch et al., *Gegen Rassenhass*, 98–99).

¹¹² This included antisemitic remarks from members of the government in Christian Social publications, dismissals targeting Jewish physicians (as “socialists”), the removal of Jews from positions in the civil service and teaching, the expulsion of Jews from the executive committee of the bar association, and the refusal to admit Jews to the higher echelons of the Fatherland Front (Bruce F. Pauley, *From Prejudice to Persecution: A History of Austrian Anti-Semitism* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1992), 268–73). On the encouragement by Heimwehr and Christian Social spokesmen of antisemitic behavior, “especially in economic and social spheres,” see Freidenreich, *Jewish Politics*, 186.

¹¹³ For the critique of liberalism in the ruling circles of the Dollfuss regime, as well as among the Catholic conservative forces that supported it, see Heinrich Busshoff, “Das Dollfuss-Regime in Österreich als geistesgeschichtliches Problem unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der ‘Schöneren Zukunft’ und der ‘Reichspost’” (PhD diss., University of Würzburg, 1964).

¹¹⁴ On the revolutionary nature of fascism, see George Mosse, *The Fascist Revolution: Toward a General Theory of Fascism* (New York, 1999). Michael Mann defines fascism as “the pursuit of a transcendent and cleansing nation-statism through paramilitarism” (*Fascists* [Cambridge, 2004], 13). Mann’s treatment of Austria (chap. 6) is

In fact, it was not even nationalist: Austria was not a nation.¹¹⁵ Its leaders were not interested in power for its own sake. One famous image of the diminutive Engelbert Dollfuss has him on his knees receiving a blessing from the clergy. Humble prostrations are not standard in the repertoires of fascist leaders.

At its core the Austrian corporatist state was reactionary: an opponent to revolutionary forces in society, whether from “right” or “left.” But being fundamentally reactionary, it was, like its counterparts in Poland, Hungary, and Yugoslavia, inherently unstable and unable to summon common sacrifice.¹¹⁶ It was a place of contradiction, where a clear political ideology did not form.¹¹⁷ The point is that such contradictions produced change in Catholic thought on the race question—more so than in any other place in Europe. It was not enough that Catholic anti-Nazis confronted Nazi propaganda on the streets of Vienna; they also encountered Nazi-style racism among fellow believers. Di-

reductive, ignoring subtleties and contradictions. C. Earl Emondson has called the Austrian authoritarian regime “clerical-fascist” but writes as follows: its “ideal—regardless of the extent to which practice diverged from it—differed greatly from the egotistical militarism and racist doctrines of fascism and national socialism. . . . Austria’s leaders showed little inclination to ‘revolutionize’ the bourgeoisie or completely to vulgarize political life (though in practice venality flourished)” (*The Heimwehr and Austrian Politics* [Athens, GA, 1978], 234).

¹¹⁵ The Dollfuss regime’s “national” ideology has been summarized as follows by Wolfgang Maderthaner: “The Austrian people was supposed to become a ‘caretaker of the universal, pacifistic [völkerbefriedenden], Western mission of Germandom.’ . . . A romantic ‘Holy Empire’ in the form of a confederation was set up in opposition to ‘pagan’ National Socialism and, above all, against ‘Protestant’ Prussian centralism” (“Legitimationsmuster des Austrofaschismus,” in *Der Führer bin ich selbst: Engelbert Dollfuss—Benito Mussolini Briefwechsel*, ed. Wolfgang Maderthaner and Michaela Maier [Vienna, 2004], 133).

¹¹⁶ This failure to mobilize popular support was tied to the continuing rift in Austrian society between Catholicism and Social Democracy: almost certainly the corporatist state further alienated large segments of the Austrian working class with its evident clericalism. Anton Burghardt writes: “To the working class the Church seemed a state institution, which as a hostile entity . . . was politically classified and disqualified” (“Kirche und Arbeiterschaft,” in *Kirche in Österreich, 1918–1965*, ed. Ferdinand Klostermann et al., 2 vols. [Vienna, 1966], 1:272). While conceding these facts, Rudolf Ebneith also notes that Catholic offices in Austria, in keeping with Church teaching, neither explicitly endorsed nor condemned the political structures of Dollfuss’s regime (Ebneith, *Österreichische Wochenzeitschrift*, 151).

¹¹⁷ For example, by 1938 a corporatist order—the central ideological legitimation for the authoritarian regime—had yet to be realized in Austria, even in rudimentary stages (Walter Goldinger, “Der geschichtliche Ablauf der Ereignisse in Österreich von 1918 bis 1945,” in *Geschichte der Republik Österreich*, ed. Heinrich Benedikt [Munich, 1954], 262–66). Perhaps the best gauge of this unfinished, unformed character of the Church was the meandering language of Cardinal Innitzer, who supported the work of Hildebrand, Oesterreicher, and Harand but also sought good terms with Catholic nationalists and ultimately with Adolf Hitler. The best general work is Viktor Reimann, *Innitzer: Kardinal zwischen Hitler und Rom* (Vienna, 1988).

rect awareness that Nazi “barbarism” had entered the heart of their Church triggered desperation in people like Dietrich von Hildebrand.¹¹⁸

But it would be incorrect to think of Hildebrand, Harand, Oesterreicher, and their allies as constituting a faction or interest group. Catholicism of this time was one world: in his *Christliche Ständestaat* Hildebrand popularized the work of Karl Adam, while confrontation with precisely this work intensified the antiracist commitment of Johannes Oesterreicher. In a letter of May 1939 to the theologian Karl Thieme he cited with bitter opprobrium words that Adam had published three years earlier: “Our time goes deeper than earlier times, because the unity of the nation is founded not only in the spirit, but also in the blood.”¹¹⁹

Catholic anti-Nazis were also not outsiders. Harand and Oesterreicher counted influential figures among their acquaintances, like Vienna’s Cardinal Innitzer. Because of Oesterreicher’s unusual combination of intellectual and pastoral gifts, he attracted Jews and Jewish converts seeking conversations about Catholicism—for example, the conductor Otto Klemperer and the writer Jakob Wassermann.¹²⁰ He appeared regularly in the afternoon social and political gatherings at Dietrich von Hildebrand’s apartment in the Herrengasse, and he reputedly had a hand in the selection of Kurt Schuschnigg as successor to Engelbert Dollfuss.¹²¹ Oesterreicher gained directorship of the Opus St. Pauli through the intervention of one of Vienna’s most prominent and politically active Catholic intellectuals, Georg Bichlmair, SJ. But he also did not hesitate to criticize Bichlmair in print.¹²² His attacks on other fellow Catholics, like publisher Josef Eberle or Bishop Alois Hudal, were less forgiving. This history

¹¹⁸ For Hildebrand’s understanding of Nazism as “barbarism” at war with “the West as a whole,” see Paul Stöcklein, “Zeitige Aufklärung über Hitler,” in Seifert, *Dietrich von Hildebrand*, 69.

¹¹⁹ Letter of Johannes Oesterreicher to Karl Thieme, May 4, 1939, Institut für Zeitgeschichte, Munich.

¹²⁰ Hildebrand, *Memoiren*, 99, 108.

¹²¹ The gatherings began in October 1934, and audiences soon exceeded one hundred. Besides Oesterreicher, the invitees included Alfred Kastil, Klaus Dohn, Rudolf Allers, Rudolf von Herrnitz, Ferdinand Frodl, Dr. Robert John, Paul Graf Thun, Rudolf Graf Kinsky, Heinrich Mataja, Alfred Missong, Oscar Bam, Karl Rudolf, Nikolaus Hovorka, Otto Maria Karpfen, Willi Reich (ibid., 109). Convinced that a chancellorship of the Heimwehr leader Starhemberg would be a disaster for Austria, Oesterreicher exerted influence upon Dietrich von Hildebrand to intercede with President Miklas to appoint Schuschnigg. Von Hildebrand recalled Oesterreicher’s “iron will” and an “ability to exert pressure upon others that one can hardly oppose” (ibid., 106).

¹²² He wrote, for example, that Bichlmair was excessively concerned with supposed questions of legality and with Jews’ “destructive influence,” when “today Jews expect with good reason love from Christians—but how seldom do they receive it!” (*Die Erfüllung*, no. 4 [1936]: 204–6). On Bichlmair’s power in the political circles in Schuschnigg’s Vienna, see Gudula Walterskirchen, *Engelbert Dollfuss, Arbeitermörder oder Heldenkanzler* (Vienna, 2004).

suggests that, in Vienna, the scope of Catholic dialogue was broader than its political terrain.

These confrontations between Oesterreicher and Eberle were vigorous and unsettling precisely because they occurred between people who knew one another intimately. They were productive of change on the race question because they were both intra-German and intra-Catholic. Within those two spheres the knowledge of National Socialism and its implications was most direct, the unease over compromise on matters of race the most urgent. Catholics in other countries may have written that race was not determinative, not decisive, not the driving motor of history, but Johannes Oesterreicher wrote that it did not *exist*.

This perception was of course exceptional, and Oesterreicher knew well the racism pervading popular beliefs about history and religion. Precisely for that reason he viewed “religious antisemitism” as anachronistic. Because of racism’s grip on the popular imagination, Austrians who saw Jews as accursed could not help thinking that this had some imprint on their “racial” character as well. In Vienna, massive acceptance of race as real made an obvious fiction of “purely religious” antisemitism. It is no coincidence that the Vatican II document Oesterreicher had a hand in drafting, *Nostra Aetate*, condemned racism immediately after antisemitism. His confrontation with Nazified Catholics in 1930s Vienna taught him that the two were inseparable.

That decade also encouraged the emergence of a special Austrian identity. To be sure, most Austrians felt German and supported *Anschluss* with Germany.¹²³ Yet many also felt distinct from Germans and argued for continued separation: their convictions derived in part from monarchism, pacificism, and anti-Prussian Catholicism and in part from a general desire to keep Hitler out of Austria. All of these sentiments came together in support of an Austrian “mission.” In September 1933, Irene Harand launched her weekly *Gerechtigkeit* with a call to Austrians to show “the world that there is a German tribe that has a completely different understanding of humanity, truth, and justice than the people who surround Hitler.”¹²⁴ Alfred Missonig, a member of Winter’s circle, viewed Catholic Austria as a necessary counterbalance to militaristic Prussia.¹²⁵ Hildebrand also idealized Austria, and his group projected the “Austrian mission” as involving a “providential collective task of significance for all humanity” secured in a Christian bulwark against National Socialism.¹²⁶ As

¹²³ *Anschluss* was the official Social Democratic party platform before 1933.

¹²⁴ *Gerechtigkeit*, September 6, 1933.

¹²⁵ On Missonig’s clear-eyed opposition to the Nazis and his personal reasons for hating Prussia, see Norbert Leser, *Grenzgänger: Österreichische Geschichte in Totenbeschwörungen*, 2 vols. (Vienna, 1981), 1:107–40. He was inspired in part by the German immigrant and well-known pacifist Friedrich Wilhelm Foerster.

¹²⁶ Ebner, *Österreichische Wochenzeitschrift*, 130, 145. See also the work of Hil-

we know, Ernst Karl Winter believed that the Austrian specificity must be reflected in Austrian racial distinctiveness. But he was not alone: the Franciscan anti-Nazi Cyrill Fischer rejoiced in the underrepresentation of the “Nordic” type in Austria: this type, with its arrogant belief in superiority, had helped produce the Nazi personality.¹²⁷ He was echoing Engelbert Dollfuss, who believed that centuries of living among other peoples had made the Austrian “softer, more patient, and more understanding of foreign cultures.”¹²⁸

The Austrian specificity was also a matter of demography. Further east, Catholics interpreted the size of Jewish communities—in some urban settings one-third of the population—as ruling out compromise. The “Jewish problem” was thought to require a radical solution, and the consensus on this matter was so overwhelming that one can count alternative views on the fingers of one hand.¹²⁹ Further west and north (in the Czech lands), Jewish communities were smaller and the Jewish question not as prominent in the consciousness of Catholics. If antisemitism has social bases, then it was bound to be more of a factor in areas where Jews were more socially relevant. So too with its critics. In that sense Vienna was a city of the center—one where Jews were relevant enough to concern nationally minded Catholics but not so numerous that there was practically no willingness to think of them as cocitizens.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

What lessons can one draw from this story of Catholic racism? The first pertains to the Church itself. Despite its social and institutional coherence, there was no such thing as “the Church”: bishops, clergy, and politically engaged Catholics spoke with many voices. Scholars who focus on Vatican pronouncements of universalism would conclude that if any question was settled in the 1930s, it was the race question. In fact, the institutional Church left huge spaces for debate about how to discern divine will in history, whether through nation,

debrand’s collaborator (Otto Maria Karpfen, *Oesterreichs europäische Sendung: Ein aussenpolitischer überblick* [Vienna, 1935]. [Karpfen later became known as a Brazilian literary critic, writing under the name Otto Maria Carpeaux.]

¹²⁷ Fischer, *Die Nazisozi*, 66–68. For Fischer’s biography, see Martin Kugler, “Cyrill Fischer OFM: Ein Pionier gegen Rassenhass und Antisemitismus,” in Mikrut, *Faszinierende Gestalten*, 23–44.

¹²⁸ Busshoff, *Das Dollfuss-Regime*, 9.

¹²⁹ The two prominent Polish Catholics who came out for tolerance of Jews as fellow Polish citizens were the Wilno law professor Marian Zdziechowski and the Wilno student activist Henryk Dembiński. The charismatic and courageous Dembiński later became a Communist and hoped to marry Catholicism and Marxism. He was executed by the Germans in 1941. See Leon Brodowski, *Henryk Dembiński: Człowiek dialogu* (Warsaw, 1988).

race, or other categories. And Catholics speculated with passion, especially in Central Europe. Not only were there racists and antiracists in the same church, but they could even cite the same Catholic authors to support their divergent views. Critics are impressed by the institutional Church's own pretense of representing unchanging wisdom, but in the Jewish question one sees fantastic transformation within a few decades.¹³⁰ Diversity among Catholics at any time is matched by change over time.

Church members felt free to ally with forces outside the Church in pursuit of what they saw as the true faith. Oesterreicher and Hildebrand published dozens of articles by Protestant, Jewish, and nonaffiliated writers. Yet this de facto ecumenism has hardly been noted, because it should not have existed—at least not according to the magisterium. Again, scholars who take the Vatican's word on the Church's substance risk missing important undercurrents of change: the changes at Vatican II in Church teaching on Jews originated far from Rome, in Austria under Hitler's shadow.

Both antiracists and racists belonged to a dynamic, changing Church that embodied tension and contradiction. What disturbed the former about the latter—and constituted racism's challenge when it entered the Church—was the way it combined the authority of modern science with a sense of ultimate moral conviction.¹³¹ Catholic racism in Central Europe was German national (anti-Roman) and modern. It appealed to subjective needs for community, provided the legitimacy of theological science, restored a lost feeling of certainty to Catholic ethics, and recovered a supposedly lost sense of wholeness. But it also offered apparently unimpeachable, scientific legitimation for anti-semitism among those for whom religion remained important. It was therefore extremely dangerous.¹³²

The argument here is not that antiracist Catholics were numerous, representative, or even influential in their time. So-called bridge builders, like publisher Josef Eberle, were more influential.¹³³ But racism's opponents represented what theologian John Courtney Murray called the "growing end" of tradition; when one looks at the history of the Church in the last half century, this was a strand in Catholic thinking that could stand the test of time.¹³⁴

¹³⁰ For an argument that change has been the norm of Church history over the last half century, see Gregory Baum, *Amazing Church: A Catholic Theologian Remembers a Half-Century of Change* (Maryknoll, NY, 2005).

¹³¹ Scherzberg, *Kirchenreform*, 116.

¹³² Here I would revise Oesterreicher, who said that modern racism was not entirely new but had predecessors: "Ce qui, chez lui, est nouveau, c'est la puissance de mensonge de l'appareil pseudo-scientifique et la volonté absolue de destruction" (*Racisme*, 49). It was not the combination of lie and science that was the problem, but rather the combination of belief and science.

¹³³ On Eberle, see Peter Eppel, *Zwischen Kreuz und Hakenkreuz* (Vienna, 1980).

¹³⁴ R. Scott Appleby, *The Ambivalence of the Sacred: Religion, Violence, and Reconciliation* (Boston, 2000), 45.

Among the historian's challenges is to describe the limits of moral awareness without judging or excusing. "Good-willed" or not, Catholics of the 1930s operated within popular and scientific discourses that suffocated doubts about the reality of race: it seemed an inescapable fact of existence, like physical dimensions or mass. Scholarly studies have yet to recreate the mental horizons of that time. We know that anthropologists in the Anglo-American world moved from biological to cultural concepts of community, but even a brief glance at the writings of this time from both sides of the Atlantic shows a jumble of beliefs we would now consider incompatible. This was a moment between paradigms, for which—like Dollfuss's Catholic state—no sufficient description has been found. For example, Berkeley anthropologist Robert Lowie placed Wilhelm Schmidt in the same camp as his *Doktorvater*, Franz Boas,¹³⁵ while the American Jesuit John LaFarge—an opponent of racism who would later march with Martin Luther King Jr.—likewise cited Wilhelm Schmidt as an authority questioning the validity of the term "race."¹³⁶

The war, and the genocide of the Jews, created a new context in which biological racism became passé. In 1947 Hermann Muckermann was openly repudiating racism in the western sectors of Berlin, writing, for example, "there is no scientific foundation for saying that the Nordic race is God's highest revelation. Differences of race are only bodily [*Die Unterscheidungsmerkmale sind rein körperlicher Art*]."¹³⁷ If Muckermann had earlier passionately opposed "racially mixed" marriages, now he tolerated them and became a member of the "society for Christian-Jewish cooperation."¹³⁸ The lost war had caused scales to fall from the Jesuit's eyes, and he began to see things that were crystal clear to Johannes Oesterreicher before the first shots had been fired in 1939—and before the first transports of "racially alien" Jews had been sent to the death camps. Johannes Oesterreicher's elderly parents never ventured beyond Moravia, and after the war he discovered that they too had been included on these transports: first to Theresienstadt, then to Auschwitz.

¹³⁵ In Suzanne Marchand's account, Schmidt was a representative of an anti-Darwinian trend, a proponent of so-called *Kulturkreislehre*. In 1937 the Viennese-born Robert Lowie—a student of Boas and professor of anthropology at Berkeley—claimed that Schmidt's work was really not so different from the culture-area theory of Boas and his followers (Marchand, "Priests," 305). Lowie was a cultural diffusionist who argued that cultures borrowed and lent cultural traits. Like Schmidt, he opposed cultural evolutionism.

¹³⁶ *Reichspost* author Alexander Novotny (January 22, 1934) cited Schmidt as example of the "historical method" that has done so much to criticize the "dominant race science [*Rassenlehre*]."

¹³⁷ Grosch-Obenauer, "Hermann Muckermann," 30.

¹³⁸ In his study of racism Oesterreicher wrote with enthusiasm about the mixing of people of different backgrounds: "A mélange enlarges the realm of the possible . . . and permits innumerable new combinations" (*Racisme*, 45). This sort of enthusiasm for race mixing was marginal in American Catholicism.